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PEEPUL LEAVES

POEMS WRITTEN IN INDIA

BY

H. G. KEENE

AUTHOR OF "EX EREMO," AND "UNDER THE ROSE"

Therewith a wind, ...
Made in the leaves grene, a noise soft,
Accordant to the foules song on loft.

Chaucer

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PEEPUL LEAVES.

Rupmati

A TALE OF MEDIÆVAL MALWA.

I.

When the winds are laid asleep
On the Campanellan steep;
When the opal morning silence
Bathes the sides of siren islands;
When the level sunlight shines
Underneath the stirless pines,
Which, about the gleaming hill tops
Rear, like domes of stone, their still tops;

While the tideless Bay, below,
Shimmers in a satin sheen,
Fawning, fainting, falsely fair,
Lighted by the languid glow,
And upon her bosom rocks
Fisher-boats, we know she mocks
Those alone who have not seen
What her other mood has been,
When—in wild autumnal nights,
Torn and dragged by sweeping skies,
Flaming with Saint Elmo lights,
Lashed by the white squall—all her crowds
Of crawling hills and streaming valleys
Toss and catch Man's helpless galleys
In a blind and inexorable malice.

II.

Such are the ways of Love with men,
So woman smiles, and man believes,
So Roman Pyrrha charms again;
And so the modern Horace grieves,

Oft as the sudden tempests rise
And clouds make dark the changeful skies,
And the water on which he seemed to float
Plays cup and ball with his helpless boat;
But the fault is in man.
By a fever nursed
His love is only passion's thirst;
And springs are many; but the few
He craves belong to others.
True,
He may usurp them, if he will;
But, after he has drunk his fill,
The bitter drop will rise among the sweets,
His morbid being yield to other heats,
And so the old game goes on, one cheated, one who cheats.

* * * * * *

Can this be love, this vapour of earth,
This causer of cares and fears,
That falls upon its place of birth,
A fount of blood and tears?

Say, Powers around, below, above!
What hate can be if this be love.

III.

Ah! fools of self, we cannot know
What the mystery's meaning is,
If we deem that it is so
Nature gives her truest bliss.
Not in falsehood and pretence,
Not in seeking joys of sense,
Is pleasure found; but in the art
Skilled to soothe another's pain,
In the sympathetic heart
Answering to the tutored brain,
In the soul that learns to see
Nothing but law can make us free,—
The alchemy for which the gold of beauty
Shines in the fiery crucible of duty.
Love is where the evening glows,
Where the early violet blows,

Is where any bird is calling,
Any spotted serpent crawling,
Any stream of water falling;
Are no human friendships near?
Love is about thee; have no fear.

IV.

Yet this will not content thee? Feeble man
  Complains that all his being has been blighted
Because he may not hope—do all he can—
  To be with his ideal soul united.
Woman, he finds, will always be a snare,
  Even though unwillingly, a mere temptation,
Meaning to bless yet cloud his life with care
  Unless he shuns her fatal fascination.
He holds from Heaven no covenant of bliss,
  No absolute promise that his plans shall prosper;
His sole beatitude is only this—
  To make a maid of cloud, and fail to clasp her.

Yet, well he knows, the world has never seen
  Men knit, without mean purpose, each to other;
Self-seeking man to man has never been
  What brother is to sister, son to mother.
What then? Be bold, and still the quest pursue,
  Though often poisoned by the thing you cherish,
Though seeking roses you have gathered rue,
  And found your hopes in disappointment perish:
The clouds may roll away, and on your night
  A planet shine, when meteors have departed,
Will you refuse to bless its amber light,
  And stumble on, alone and empty-hearted?
True love knows nought of selfishness or sin,
And plays a game where only losers win;
Love—love alone—can break the unseen wall
That hides us from each other, one and all;
A bliss for which no price can pay but pain,
A loss that far outweighs all common gain;
    For those who kiss love's chastening rod
      And purge with tears their eyes,
      Through such humiliation rise,
    And find that Love is God,

Who, in the dawning of that better day,
Shall reign, when Hope and Faith, fulfilled, have passed away.

V.

Marching through the palace-gateway, marching down the public street,
Elephants with rolling paces, camels with the spongy feet,
Troops of horsemen, bands of spearmen, glancing in the growing day,
Marshalled by barbaric music, hastening to be slain or slay,
Such the show that scares the City, such the long procession drawn,
Vexing with unwonted stir the still and lonely heart of dawn!
E'en the pale trader buckles on the brand
His child has sharpened with a trembling hand;

The foeman's force is swarming at the gate;
Within, the women with their infants wait,
Alone, the crisis of impending fate;
Alone they wait, for their defenders all
Have formed for fight, or stayed to guard the wall.

Where is their Chief? His eager horse is neighing,
His monarch's banner in the wind blows free;
Haste thee! The host will murmur at thy staying,
The battle waits but thee!
Stooping his crest, below the arch he came;
High hope was in his look, and proud,
But tear-dimmed eyes, athwart the latticed frame,
Looked down upon the armed and glittering crowd,
And a woman's heart beat at the surging loud
Of the sea of living flame.
"Farewell, beloved!" the warrior said,
And on the terrace, for a moment, stayed;
"The arrogant enemy is at my door,
"And finds me lagging; farewell! ere night falls
"I will bring captive, humbled in our halls,
"This insolent oppressor of the poor.

"Wait thou in courage. He (with whom is peace!)
"Who makes the madness of the mighty cease;
"The Just, the Merciful, the Mighty Lord,
"Shall be my buckler, if not"—here his sword
Bent to the ground—"still blessed be His award!"

VI.

Bid me not to tell of battle,
Where the clash of swords and spears,
Cannons' roar and muskets' rattle
Sound a Doxology in Satan's ears;
The victory is not to the strong in right,
Faithful endeavour yields to mastering might;
In vain Bahadur, parting from his horse,
Guides, from an elephant, his failing force;
Like some tall ship his plumaged presence rides
Above the conflict of opposing tides;
In vain; the place of pride, the crest of fame,
Direct the hostile archer's aim,

Pierced through his mail, and drenched with gore,
He in his howdah sinks, to rise no more.
Death's Angel filled his maw that day,
But took no nobler, less reluctant prey.

VII.

An Eastern army yields as soon
As he who led them leads no more.
He fell about the hour of noon,
The next the hostile forces pour
Along the flying bridge that gives
Admission to the fugitives;
The victors mingling with the vanquished hosts,
Resistless press upon the City's posts,
Driving them from the ramparts, as a leopard
Drives from the fold a flock without a shepherd:
Weak now the struggle; soon they see
The enemy fill their cherished streets,
Drunk with the wine of victory,
A death to all he meets.

A troop of chosen cavaliers
Who drew a more obedient sword,
Alone remain, with serried spears,
To gather round the Victor-Lord;
And on they confidently go
To the dead man's Seraglio.
These their leader, fired with hate,
Left before the sculptured gate,
Entering, to announce within
What had been the award of Fate;
Halting where, disconsolate,
On the ground a veiled form sate,
Gathering despair from all the unwonted din;
The intruder's errand she could read,
Himself she scarcely seemed to heed.

VIII.

Some hearts there are whom beauty tempts the most
When shadowed thus in passionate distress;
Such was the General of the invading host,
A yielding slave had moved him less.

He wooes, she turns her eyes another way;
"Thou hast slain my lord, his wife in mercy slay!"
"Ah! Houri, hide not thus thy face,
"Nor think the Moon's majestic beams
"Would suffer any deep disgrace
"If their mild splendour on a mortal beams."
Still veiled, she gave him neither Yea, nor Nay,
But ever the same moan, "Slay me, oh, slay!"
"Aye, lady, say you so?" at last he cried,
Incensed by contest with a conqueror's pride;
"I waste no words on rebels. Do you mark
"Where shines the sun?" "No; all to me is dark,
"My sun is set for ever."
"He is: but when
"He sets for me and happy sons of men,
"Prepare to meet me with submission due;
"Such is my will: my will is law for you."
"Since it is so," the hunted creature said,
And bared her cheek, where shrank—as shrinks the rose
In the hot blast of summer—all the red,
(Nor marvel if this bitter path she chose,
Such are the terms barbarian laws impose,

That, taught betimes their freedom to control,
The women scarcely know they have a soul,)
" Since nought but this thy wishes may fulfil
" Thou shalt not find resistance to thy will;
" Since nought but this may be the law for me,
" Leave me till then; till then I still am free."

The conqueror rose, the curtain fell,
And now she is alone once more,
A settled pallor on her outraged cheek;
And, though the faithful girls she knew so well
Gather around her and implore,
She will not look at them, nor speak.
Silent she sate, with torpid sense.
Slumberer-like, in wakefulness intense.
So for a while; but one who longs to mourn
Will, soon or later, find the spirit bow,
When once it learns to feel itself forlorn,
And hot tears spring beneath the frozen brow,
As springs the fountain, hot and bright,
Beneath Jamnutri's summit white.

Wailing one lost and unforgotten name,
Long she lamented, till the short sobs came;
At last, slow rising, veiled her supple frame,
And, fixing on the ground a firm, fixed view,
Beckoned a trusty handmaid and withdrew;
While, as to mock the unnatural mortal calm,
A rising whirlwind tossed the neighbouring palm;
And on the palace-pinnacles there broke
A tempest: torrents fell; the thunder spoke.

IX.

The day wore on; the storm decreased;
The sun went down the cloudy sky,
Then came the pageant of the East,
The evening pomps that beautify
The close of daylight, in that clime
Where twilight is a spectral time

That flits as soon as seen—
Beckoning to night—yet leaves a mark
Upon the border of the dark,
To show where life, before it waned, had been.
No speech can tell, no pencil paint
The purple deeps, the gold, the red
Which, like celestial halos, shed
About some visionary saint,
Hide, while they deck, the day-god's sinking head.
And night came on, moist, dewy, calm and cool,
The palm-trees whispered to the soothing moon,
Stars shone, reflected deep in many a pool,
And lights from windows striped the broad lagoon
That backed the palace; but the fronting gate
Stood open to the conqueror's haughty tread;
By the portcullis post no warder sate;
Unchecked, unchallenged, on he sped,
Wandering and wondering, till from far
A prelude sounded from a soft sitar,
And, as a clue along the unknown shade,
This voice behind the farther colonnade:—

SONG.

"Under the mouldered graves
"Where the dead men lie,
"Over the untrodden waves
"True love can fly,
"Love can fly.
"As goes the moth to the light,
"To the blossom the bee,
"As the day turns to night,
"My spirit to thee
"Turns, to thee."

X.

The conqueror's heart beat high,
He did not dare to speak,
Yet, doubt not, hope was in his eye
And on his swarthy cheek,
Even as once on his, whom morning's breath
Had flattered on the road to dusty Death.
Wide open stood the inner door,
The air was thick with incense, and the floor

Soft with the woofs of Turkey and of Ind;
While, mute and calm, as one who ne'er had sinned,
A slave-girl, waiting with a lamp,
Rose, touched her forehead, and went on before.
The night-breeze on the mere has gathered damp,
And, sighing, through the marble tracery comes,
Bearing vague noises from the distant camp,
And women's cries drowned by the clattering drums;
While onward as the astonished soldier goes
His being drinks a deep harmonious repose.
"A woman's faith, God wot! and fools indeed
"There are, like him who was to-day my foe,
"Who know not that the living still succeed
"The vanished darling and the transient woe;
"Love what you have in life. You die,
"The next that comes takes up the history."

XI.

Still voiceless solitudes the corridors,
Still empty splendour every long saloon;
Light sank exhausted on the silent floors,
And died within the shaded Anderun,

Yet dimly showed a high alcove,
With broidered tissues draped around,
Which long had known no other sound
But whispered words of wedded love.
There, from the arched engrailments to the ground,
Hung silken webs from China's freakish loom.
The exulting warrior halted; he had found
The nest of love, bowered in its own sweet gloom;
The slave-girl veiled her light, saluting: "Lo!
"The place and time. Speak not, my lord, I go."
Stretch but a hand to yonder throne,
Lift but a drapery,
Lord, lord at last, the victory
Is now indeed your own.

XII.

What fixes, then, that frozen look,
What lifts that starting hair?
In palsied grasp the hangings shook
As if a snake were there.

—Pale, livid, lay each jewelled limb;
Collyrium-stained, each sightless eye
Stared, vacant, dull, and dim,
To shine no more, as yesterday, on him
For whom she lived, for whom she dared to die.
Alas! no skill of simulative art
Could tell the tragedy of that sudden sight,
The morning star engulphed in endless night,
The joy of life quenched in a strangled heart.
But, from that day, the soldier smiled no more,
Or—if he did—men shuddered when he smiled,
And, ere the year had end, distraught and wild,
Was borne to earth, drowned in his own foul gore.

[A true story; see "The Turks in India," p. 58. Rupmati was a poetess of celebrity. The unveiling of a Hindu widow when she has resolved to perform Sati is referred to in § viii.]

CHRISTMAS, 1878.

Now, in our late-vexed land, the citrons bloom,
The oleander's crimson banners rise,
The orange hangs her stars in verdant gloom,
And freshening airs are blown from softer skies.

Once more the time of festival draws near,
Loved by our tribes what land so'er they roam;
When with good-will and peace and better cheer
They make a tender mimicry of Home.

The holy time when all the sons of Man—
If what the angels sang that night was truth—
With one accord should praise the pitying plan
That gave the victory to Right and Ruth;

But our poor world must tarry yet awhile,
And mar the order yet wherein she rolls;
Her ruthful sons must rather sigh than smile,
Those who love peace must seek it in their souls.

Christmas, this year, brings other moods than these.
For angels' hymns we hear the cannon's roar,
The cries of battle crossing on the breeze,
And all the horrid harmony of War;

And nearer still, our season's cheer is marred,
Disease and want intrude their choir of pain;
And all the ways of God to man seem hard,
And over the ways of man his passions reign.

And we must needs remember that the Lord
Of whom the Heralds sounded that decree,
Said, when He came, "Not peace! I bring a sword";
And who will make those messages agree?

The nation is increased, but not the joy,
The harvest ripens, but it gives no food,
And for the smilings of a new-born Boy
We have parted spoil, and garments rolled in blood.

And, for the hopes that gather round the time,
We have to harbour anger and alarms,
For joyful bells to ring a funeral chime,
And guard a starved inheritance in arms.

Yet, when the heaven is darkening to the dawn
The watchful bird that feels the daybreak sings,
And, while the veil upon our light is drawn,
The poet's heart presages happier things.

Even now, perhaps, for us a Child is born
  Who snaps the bow and makes the battle cease ;
The stormy night prepares the shining morn,
  And Right and Mercy found the throne of Peace.

A Poet's View of Cyprus.

[Whether anybody ever sent Béranger a cask of this famous vintage, or whether the effects of Cyprus wine were only described by him from imagination, it is equally amusing to observe his conception of an island now so interesting to British subjects. It is probable, indeed, that practically, no more generous liquor is within reach of most of the sons of the North now occupying it than Commissariat beer. In that case it may be surmised that the only heathen deity of whom they will be reminded is Venus Acidalia.]

I.

Cyprus! thy wine that brings my youth again,
Has made me see the blindfold boy once more,
Pallas, Zeus, Ares, and thy Paphian train
—Gods that, long since, we utterly foreswore—

If modern authors, with their Atheist arts,
Have made us curse a worship so divine,
'Tis that this wine has never warmed their hearts,
For all the gods were born of Cyprus wine.

II.

Yes! I return—Lyæus is so strong—
To that Greek worship I was taught at school,
Muses and Graces! dance ye to my song,
Smile Phœbus! Kiss me, Zephyr, soft and cool!
Round me in joyous choirs for ever play
Fauns, Sylvans, Nymphs both of the oak and vine!
But from my casks be Naiads far away!
For all the gods were born of Cyprus wine.

III.

Thanks to this wine, with its bituminous taste
Towards those ancient shrines I seem to fare
Where beauty, crowned with myrtle-garlands, chased
From man's horizon all the clouds of care;

Born in the North where winds are fierce and loud,
We never saw such bright horizons shine,
Yet man once peopled them with that fair crowd,
For all the gods were born of Cyprus wine.

IV.

With upturned eyes the worthy Hesiod strode
In search of gods with many a rolling name,
Reft of ideas he vainly planned an ode . . .
When lo! a flagon vast from Cyprus came.
Ah! then our Poet caracoled in mirth,
Hot with the nectar where all wonders shine,
The pregnant flagon gave Olympus birth—
For all the gods were born of Cyprus wine.

V.

For deities, fables of those regions old,
We have goblins hard to woo, or name, in rhyme,
Were-wolves, and ghouls, and vampires lean and cold,
The dismal playthings of a barbarous time.

Out on the Lost, their charnels and their ghosts!
Out on the horrors! They have given me mine!
Foul bats! to Venus' doves resign your posts,
For all the gods were born of Cýprus wine.

VI.

Anacreon, Menander, Æschylus,
Each drank of this, and still of each we hear
Ah! pour again, and even perhaps to us
Posterity, in turn, will lend an ear:
No?
Yet, descending from a happy place,
Hebe, love-girt, a moment shall incline
And fill a cup for me, with smiling face,
For all the gods were born of Cyprus wine.

FROM THE PERSIAN OF BEDIL.

TRUE BLISS.

Some seek to glut in lust of wealth
An avaricious mood,
Some see no bliss but what they find
In joys of flesh and blood;
In Bedil's eye, the whole of them
Are in a parlous plight;
True bliss is known to those alone
For whom all things are good.

EPITAPH ON HERSELF.

An infant fifteen years,
For twenty more a woman,
Thirty, a sort of nondescript,
But still urbane and human!
Into the everlasting mill without a question thrust,
I went in, wit and grace and joy, and ended here in dust.

THE PALM TREE.

God gave to every land the trees
That fare the best in each,
The Fir, that loves the mountain breeze,
The Plane, the Beech;
To us the Palm; beneath whose boughs
No cooling shade is found,
And not the hardiest stag can browse
The unholy ground.
Yet love her; though her slender form
Tower in a torrid sky,
Without a cloud, save when the storm
Goes darkening by.

Though bulbous Dome and stiff Minar
By her with hovels stand,
Where reigns in wrath the fiery star
Of this lorn land:
Though not by her the Oak may spread,
Nor Pine, with wholesome breath,
And Man's sad horoscope is read,—
"Dull life, quick death":
Change, for your hopes of triumph here,
Forgetfulness and calm;
With Pine and Oak are doubt and fear,
Rest with the Palm.

TWO LADIES.

(AFTER PRIOR.)

WHEN, wondering, I wooed Chloris last
  Her feelings seemed to flow not;
My heart, no doubt, beat hot and fast,
  But what her's did I know not.

'Tis true she took me to her arms,
  But still she looked above me;
Enthralled my senses with her charms,
  Yet never seemed to love me:

Found fault with all I did or said,
Was hard and analytic;
And struck my ardour dumb and dead,
So much she played the critic.

With Doris I'm in different guise,
And meet with less resistance;
She reads my verses, calls me wise,
But—keeps me at a distance:

She marks my words, admires my air,
Wishes me joy and glory;
But, when I ask her heart to share,
"Paws off!" is still the story.

Which, then, is she that loves me best?
One rates, the other praises;
This leaves a void within my breast,
That ruins what she raises.

Ah! Venus, queen of love, perform
  A miracle on Doris,
Give her a heart that's soft and warm,
  Or—give her head to Chloris.

AFTER THE BALL.

(To A.)

A SILVER spray about us spread
From magic moonlight's falling streams,
As, standing where our paths were shred
Beneath the firs, you softly said—
"Good night! have happy dreams."

You are not one to mock your friend
Whose heart so far, so long, was true,
Yet no coquette who loves to spend
Her idle words for worthless end
Was half so false as you.

Good nights are his whose happy heart
  Lies near to one that beats the same,
Who needs not smile to hide a smart,
Nor vainly act a conscious part
  Of "Aimer qui vous aime."

And happy dreams are his who rests
  Content, though lonely; and his sleep
Enfolds him, as a mother's breasts
Enfold her child, and so invests
  His soul with spells that keep

A throng of pleasures in his brain;
  And makes him see, or seem to see,
Bright visions, like an angel train,
Mount heavenwards and descend again
  —But where are such for me?

The Wife's Dowry.

(From Plautus.)

I do not count my dowry what men a dowry call,
But bashfulness and honour, and contempt of Cupid's thrall,
The fear of God and parents' love, and peace within the hall,
True smiles for thee, and bounty free, and doing good to all.

IMITATED FROM VICTOR HUGO.

What was it that she said to me,
She, with a blossom in her breast,
The morning in her gaze of glee,
What was it she professed?

Could this by chance be what she meant,
To bring the prisoned soul to care
That God in my poor flesh has pent,
And vex its cold despair?

I felt like one by pleasure led,
I tried to take an aimless flight;
I longed to toss upon my head
A crown of golden light,

And join her days to days of mine,
And see her beauties all displayed;
And make the stars from Heaven incline,
And call aloud for aid.

The Cypress and the Rose.

Ce qui charme s'en va, ce qui fait peine reste,
La rose vit une heure, et le cyprès cent ans.

TH. GAUTIER.

FAIR is the rose—and brief,
And with one pleasure bringing twenty pains,
You kiss her fragrant heart and leaf,
They fall, and in their place the thorn remains.

Before your darling's tomb
The cypress wheels a daily growing shade,
And in its deep, perennial gloom
Your heart still sickens where its hopes were laid.

Abide not with the dead!
Dally no more with what delights you not;
But take the fallen flowers, they shed
Long fragrance when the shadows are forgot.

PARTING.

When we have kissed
And sundered again,
What have we missed,
Pleasure or pain?

Weaving of hands
And meeting of eyes—
All this demands
Watch from the wise.

Let us beware,
Lest we have lent
Substance to care
More than we meant;

For, if such token
  Passes for real,
Hearts may be broken,
  Blurred the Ideal.

True love repays
  More than you brought,
False only says
  "Nothing for nought."

And you have missed
  Not pleasure, but pain,
When you have kissed
  To sunder again.

Death.

Death is too common to be called a woe,
And being thus general, none should fear the blow,
Either for those who are dear as our own will,
Or for oneself. Were Death a real ill,
There were no end to grief; and even our bliss
Would make a present Hell.
The law is this,
That all who live shall suffer, till the close
Sings a sweet lullaby for all our woes;
So Suffering takes away Death's dreaded sting
As Death consoles the smart of Suffering.

THOUGHTS FROM GOETHE.

I.

THE race of men are wanderers ever,
And, as they struggle, ever go astray;
Yet a good man, in most perplexed endeavour,
Still keeps an inkling of the better way.

The grey of Theory, and the green of Life.

III.

The counsel of one
Is the counsel of none;
Listen to both before you have done.

FROM BÜRGER.

When Slander's tongue thy spirit stings,
Let this thought set thee right;
"The peach is not the worst of things
On which the wasps alight."

Weeds of the Woodland.

(AN APOLOGY.)

THE night had been a sea of trackless streams,
Possessed by navies of contending dreams,
Till Morning, like a herald breathing peace,
Lulled the disorder; and her cold grey beams

Part-lit my chamber; then among them stood
Phosphor, and beckoned me to such a wood
As he who saw the God-like Comedy
Went through; and there I, following as I could,

Saw glades and alleys, and across them drawn
Soft gossamers that wavered in the dawn,
And dewy slopes with wildings prankt, below
The lines of watercourses, to a lawn

Where had been set a garden; none so fair
In Gulistan, or that august repair
In which our Milton saw, with inward eye,
The cedars shining in the golden air

Of the first morning; and the light was pour'd
On wealth of bloom and fruit, and all the sward
Glittered and glowed with hues of flowers that men
Had planted to the glory of their Lord.

Then I said, weeping, "Wherefore came I here,
"Who cannot bring such gifts?" On that, the clear
Voice of a hidden speaker, hard at hand—
"Do what thou canst, and have no other fear."

And as I lay and hid my face, "Arise!"
Once more the voice, "Follow, with downward eyes,
"The path made for thee in the woodland ways,
"And meet, if so may be, a modest prize."

I doubted not, but rose and took the Quest,
And, as I wandered, gathered to my breast
Such things as grew there, till the way returned,
And Day's destruction flamed along the West.

Then, when I found the garden still a-glow,
I sighed to think that I had wandered so;
And, planting there the best of what I had,
I loathed those weeds that made so poor a show.

Ah! yet, some chance beholder, passing by,
Might say,—"The harvest of a quiet eye,
"That could not have been gathered but by one
"Whose looks were tutored by Humility."

So, if to him, thus judging, they seem fair,
He takes of them upon his heart to wear,
Or, if his love be blest, with loving hands
Make them a garland for his Lady's hair.

And, most of all, the Master of the place
(Whose gift it is if they have any grace)
May bid His gardeners not to think them weeds,
But leave them with the flowers a little space;

A little space, till, when I go to sleep,
They on my grave may innocently creep,
And, with a common touch of mortal doom,
As once I wept before, make others weep.

The Death of Akbar.

(A DRAMATIC FRAGMENT.)

The Argument.

Mohumud Jalaloodeen Akbar, the great Emperor of Hindostan, having decreed a new faith, has given displeasure to the Musulman nobles of his Court, who have, therefore, caused the murder of his friend and chief counsellor, Abool Fazl Allami, and instigated his grandson, Sultan Khushru, to intrigue for the succession to the throne. Prince Salim, the Emperor's eldest son, has in the meanwhile repented of his past misdoings, and come as a suppliant to his father's bedside in the palace of Agra, where he has been received with disgrace and imprisoned by order of the Emperor.

PERSONS:

SULTAN KHUSHRU (*Son of Prince Salim*).

ABDUL KADIR BUDAONI (*A bigoted Musulman*).

PADRE RODOLF AQUAVIVA (*A Catholic Missionary*).

RAJAH MAN SINGH (*Brother-in-law of Akbar*).

A COURTIER.

Lords, Exempts, Herald, &c.

Place.—The Diwan-i-Am of the Palace at Agra, with door at back leading to private apartments.

Time.—A.D. 1605.

SCENE I.—BUDAONI *and* COURTIER.

SCENE II.—*The same.* AQUAVIVA.

SCENE III.—*The same.* KHUSHRU.

SCENE IV.—*The same.* MAN SINGH. *Herald.*

Finis.

BUDAONI *and* COURTIER *meeting*

BUD. *Salam aleik!*

C. *W'aleikoom al Salam*

How strange that ancient salutation sounds!
Whence come you, sir? And in this warlike guise?

Bud. Sir, from Lord Khushru's camp, without the walls.

C. And you are welcome. Sure I know that voice.
That flowing beard (the grace—long lost—of manhood).
Are you not Abdul Kadir?

Bud. I am he.

C. (*kissing the hem of his garment*). Allah! And have
I lived to see once more
That pillar of *Islam!* in these dark days,
When the world totters, and spirits of evil stalk
Cloud-like upon the summits, such as thou
Art our salvation: Hail and Reverence!

Bud. Sir, I am but the servant of the Lord,
Blowing with faltering breath the mists away
That hide Him from His people: but enough;
We'll talk of this anon: I know a place
Where, on the night of the Assembly, men
Will gather, looking towards the Prophet's tomb,
And, after prayer and preaching duly made,
Will commune of the things that touch our faith
A messenger shall bring you there. Meanwhile
Your news, I pray. How fares the Emperor?

C. Not well, I fear. No one hath speech of him
But Padre Aquaviva and Man Singh.
'Tis said his soul is troubled, and he mourns
The dog, the hog, Allami: him whose wine—
Pressed from ill grapes fermented in eclipse,
And drunk from cups of all uncleanness—turned
The brain of Akbar thirty years ago.
Think you the Prince's hand was in the blow
That struck this enemy of truth? 'Tis strange
One like Salim should show such zeal for truth:
They say the dog that's dead acknowledged so——

Bud. Sir, he died fighting; let us say no more.
Happier than Faizi—barking in his kennel—
Yet he, too, tasted wrath. Well! they are gone;
They reaped as they had sown; the rest is God's.
But speak to me of Akbar; hath he said
Who is the heir?

C. That, sir, we long to know;
Your Prince——

Bud. (*softly*). The very walls of kings can hear!

Khushru is but a boy; but if he rule
Islam is safe; the best is—not Salim.

[*Looks round, then more softly still*]

Once let that drunken unbeliever learn
The use of poppy-water; his hot blood,
Warmed too long with forbidden juices, turns
To leprous humour in his languid veins;
No deed of blood to make a people stare,
And lose their hearts with pity; but long calm
To make his peace with God, and with the Prophet;
And, not far off, the quiet of the tomb;
While we, behind a grateful puppet's throne,
Raise the green flag our fathers fought for, then
When Yezdegird and all his devil host,
Whose altars blazed with thrice accursed fires,
Went down before the Caliph. What! shall we,
Sayyad and Shekh, the purest of the pure,
Make way for Guebres? Let them look to it—
Too long has Akbar trifled with the truth:
But Akbar was a man——

C. No more! The project
Is full of hopefulness; may Allah speed it!

But how look you to work? Salim is here;
And though the Emperor's greeting when he came
Was stern enough, and though since then his favour
Has been but scant, 'tis said that Aquaviva
Sits by the Emperor's couch as Satan sate
By Adam's in the Garden. And Salim
Loves the forbidden fruit too. He would listen,
In the old days of Fattehpur, to tales
Of the God Man and of His Virgin Mother,
Till Moslem brows grew dark, and even Allami
Would tremble for his fine, new-fangled creed,
In the four-sided house, while Akbar sate
Calm on the central pillar, and the men
Who differed scolded round him, here the Priests
And here the Guebres, there the Scribes, the Pundits,
And beards wagged, and opinions clashed and clanged,
Till all the place became a Babel.

Bud. Sad,
Indeed, to see a noble nature spent
Upon the desert sands of unbelief;
But so it ever must be, when the banks
Of our dear law and never-doubted faith

Are broken by the blows of heretics,
Till what was once an honest love of truth
Becomes mere lawlessness and aimless error——
But here comes Rodolf, step aside with me
Behind this column.

Enter AQUAVIVA, *his head bent, his arms crossed behind him. He approaches by a side-door leading from the interior apartments of the Emperor, and stands for some time in silent thought.*

Aq. Death seems hard to bear
After a life of worldly grandeur. God
Who made us all, and no two men alike,
To Him be thanks that I am not a King;
And, as it were not care enough
For this poor soul enamoured of the world,
To leave the warmth and brightness of a throne
For what to her seems darkness, here's this coil
Of sons and wives intriguing round one's bed.
The Emperor loves his grandson, knows his son
For truant and rebellious; called him back,
And, when he came, admitted not his force,

No, not one single of his followers,
Nor would have let himself be given entrance
Within the precincts of this Royal Fort
Save as a suppliant——
What a sight it was
To see the ruffling air Salim put on,
Turned into fear and shame, before the look
Of Akbar in his wrath: and now he lies
A captive in the Red-Stone Palace; and none
Can tell if he will live or die; meanwhile
Khushru is ever at his grandsire's side,
And his Rajputni mother, though she owns
The duty of a wife, might scarcely grieve
To see her son supplant him.
Thus three faiths
(Which cannot all be true) are joined together
To make one old man faithless, each believing
What serves it best is best: the sons of Islam
Want Khushru for a puppet; the Gentoos
Would hail him as two-thirds Gentoo; while we,
(Albeit Salim's our friend), accept the other,
Because we know which way his sinful heart

Will fly when it grows empty and the world
Has lost the power to fill it. We shall triumph,
Rather than lose our vantage-ground at Court,
And plant the Church in India.

Blessed St. Francis!
For this the life was given, but not to thee
The name, the fame, the rapture of success.
St. Rodolf Aquaviva fills the mouth
As well as Francis Xavier—does it not?
When he has cast out all the unclean spirits,
With the False Prophet, into a lake of fire.

[*The two Musulmans are seen moving behind him. On one side the Courtier seizes his right arm and places a hand on his mouth, on the other Budaoni seizes his left arm and raises a dagger. Rodolf turns his eyes in bewilderment from one to the other.*]

[*A voice is heard without, singing.*]

I said to my heart, while the toils were around me—
Let us fly to the wood where the wild branches wave,
Where the nightingale's singing and fountains are springing—
But her love-nets had found me, and I was a slave.

Bud. What roysterer makes so bold in Akbar's palace?

Aq. 'Tis Khushru.

[*They release him, but Budaoni still keeps his dagger drawn.*]

And the ribald is as welcome
As a soft west wind blowing in the morning
After a hurly-burly night of storm.

Enter KHUSHRU *with a lute in his hand.*

Kh. What is your business, loitering here so early?

Aq. The same that yours is, waiting for the end.

Kh. Your hours are numbered.

Aq. So are yours (*looking round*) and his.

C. What? is the Emperor dying?

Aq. Dead, almost.

Kh. God gave me love, the devil gave me lovers.
What, Abdul Kadir! quarrel with the Padre.
Padre! you must not heed the Molvi's gibes,
His is a keen and cutting humour. Molvi!
Vex not the Padre's simple soul, nor call him
From pious contemplation to the cares

Of mortal life. What! when my cause stands trembling
Upon the edge of hazard, they whose hands
Alone can trim the balance, turn those hands
On one another! Tut! no more of this,
Or, as I am a Prince and shall be King,
I'll teach you both good temper with my sword,
That will not leave much blood for bickering
Once it has played its part in your discussion.

Bud. My Lord, you need but speak to be obeyed,
I knew not that the Father was your friend.

Kh. I care not, I, for one cause or the other.
But for my own and love's, who taught me this:—

[*Touches his lute and sings.*]

The wine of her love is a philtre of madness
When an almond-eyed girl has my heart in her hand,
And I drink of the chalice of maidenly malice
Till the glamour of gladness makes earth fairy-land;
Then I sing in my cage like a bird at the casement,
And think my dear mistress for ever my own.
Till the night falls in terror, enhancing my error,
And I find with amazement I'm cold and alone;

But I make my escape in the dawn of the morning,
And fly to the forest made fresh by the rain,
To see the grass growing, and hear the horn blowing,
Till the daughters of scorning ensnare me again.
What is your controversy? speak it out;
Fifty tomâns to one that I resolve it.

Bud. He says there are three gods besides a woman,
And when your Highness comes to be our King
Swears you shall worship them; or, if his Pope
Says this shall all be changed, then you shall change it.
Worship a loaf of bread, a jug of wine——
I know not what——blaspheming——

Kh. Is it so?
Then, Father, I will tell you; do you see
This great courtyard before the Audience Hall,
Where myriads can be seated in the cloisters,
And view the show their monarch makes for them?
Well; when I am King, you, and our friend Budaoni,
Shall come, you two, none else, to try conclusion,
And I will have a pile of seasoned timber,
And make the whole space blaze with roaring flame,

And, having called the people from afar,
I will let blow the trumpets, and you two
Shall join your hands, and (when the fire mounts high)
Shall walk together through it from end to end;
And he who comes out living, his shall be
Known for God's truth, and all men shall embrace it;
On pain of Death—even if it teach mankind
To worship Satan. How! you do not seem
To like my test. [*Laughs.*] Good faith! you do not dare
As dares a Hindoo widow who will go
Behind a screen of straw where lies the carcass
Of one who was her husband and lie there,
While Brahmins burn the living with the dead.

Bud. My Lord! 'Twere well your widows learned to say,
(Though in another sense than His Apostle)
'Tis better far to marry than to burn.

Aq. Blasphemer; utter one more gibe like that,
And, even if the Prince will smile, your life
Is forfeit, when the folk without there know
You mock their women.

Man Singh (*without*). Peace there! Silence all!

Kh. It is the Rajah, Man Singh; he is one
Shall judge between you.

[*Man Singh appears in the alcove above them.*]

M. S. Brawlers, hold your peace.
Cannot a dying Emperor win your silence?
(*To Khushru.*) Your pardon, nephew! How comes it to pass
You let such tumult pass so near the couch
Where Akbar lies in grapple with the foe
That conquers conquerors?

Bud. Lo yon!

Kh. Is he dead?
By Allah, he has been long enough about it.
Seize all the gates, admit no men but mine,
Call in the Priests, the Molvis, and the Pundits.
Bring out the old man's robes and gold tiara,
Put seals upon his jewels, let my mother
Be taken to her husband in his prison,
There to await our pleasure!

M. S. (*gravely regarding him*). Gently, Khushru.

A voice (within). Khushru!

Kh. An echo!

The voice (more faintly). Khushru!

Kh. Once more.

The voice (fainter still). Khushru.

Kh. What brings my mother here to vex our counsels?

M. S. Your mother: would you see her once again,
You must be sudden? Go, she calls no more.

Kh. She shall be taught her place, and others also.

[*Exit* KH.]

M. S. Sirs, all is over; when I came to you
I had a sister.

Aq. Had? Where is she now?

M. S. Your knowledge, Father, stops, methinks, at that;
You cannot read Death's riddles.

Aq. Is she dead?

M. S. That faint voice, lately calling for her
Was her last breath; hearken, I tell you all
Even as it chanced, and never say again
The Rajput woman is not brave enough
To die for honour; if you think Chitor—

When twenty thousand of our women died
About their chieftain ere the warriors broke
A flame of death upon the Moslem hosts—
The tale of poets.

While my sister sate
Weeping by Akbar's couch, the old man's hand,
That played about her hair, suddenly stopped
And made a signal to me: then he raised
His eyelids, heavy with the dew of death,
And muttered "Bring Salim"; and she, who thought
Her husband's life was forfeit, quick as one
Who gives her babe a sweetmeat, from a box
Of onyx that she carried at her girdle,
Sucked out a drug of potency enough
To quench the life of yonder elephant
That basks, a living mountain, in the sun;
Then staggered forth upon the gallery,
Seeking her son, and, ere I could restrain her,
Fell headlong from the terrace to the floor;
Meanwhile the Emperor, since his glazing eye
Had not perceived her action, once more sent
To call Salim, but I—a simple brother—

Raised her and called her women, then came here
In search of Khushru.

[*The courtyard fills with the people; shouts are heard.*]

Long live Sultan Khushru!

[*The door at the back of the throne is flung open.*]

Enter LORDS, EXEMPTS, HERALD, *&c.*

Herald. People of God! the Emperor is no more;
People of God, behold your Emperor!
Heir of the Heavenly Mansions, our Salim,
Holding the world, Jahangir Nur-ud-Din.

Enter JAHANGIR, *wearing the tiara and sabre of Akbar, in a white robe.* KHUSHRU *appears behind his father manacled.*

All fall on their faces, except BUDAONI, *who is seized on each side by an executioner in a mask.*

SCENE CLOSES.

Like the Dove.

Ah! never doubt me; I would rather cease
To breathe than cease to be
Confided in by thee!
My life is held on thine affection's lease.

Ah! do not doubt me; if I ever rove,
It is but on the Sea
Of Hope and Memory,
To bring thee back some token—like the Dove.

The Dove, upon the old diluvial main,
Came bearing signs of land
Into the Patriarch's hand;
But, when her foot found rest, came not again.

Came not again—and so with me, my Love:
And when I come no more
I shall have found the shore,
And rested there for ever—like the Dove.

ÉTRENNES.

[*To a Friend*, 1*st January* 1871.]

I.

The twelve-spoked Wheel has come full round,
And we are here,
Not quite so young, perhaps, as this time year,
But safe and sound,
This Christmas tide, I and my faithful Fere.
Of many a man, better and younger far,
This will no more be said;
Food for a sateless war,
They see their children and their friends no more.

Nor gather round the hearth of Yule again,
But hover on the undiscovered shore,
Risen from their last sad bed
On Spikeren height, or by the banks of Seine,
Or in the sunny vineyards of Champagne.

II.

Yet well we know that mourning waits on mirth:—
Many, no doubt, will drink
In days to come the wine of *soixante dix*,
And say, "How good it is!"
Yet never give themselves the pain to think
Who was the Husbandman that made it so,
What chemistry that had to sink
Through the earth's crust to make that vintage grow—
What labour went before its birth.

III.

There is no remedy but thoughts like these
(As long as many bear the rule of one)
For most of what is done,
Between Saghalien and the Hebrides;

And thinking thus will only give us ease
By moments, many or few:
The sorrow is not wrought by Kings alone;
Nations are sharers too
In the earth-lust that nothing can appease
But the cold grave and monumental stone.

IV.

The year had passed its noon,
And Cæsar sate in his accustomed place,
With his impassive face
Shaded from the fierce visitings of June,
With laurels plucked in many lands
By his great kinsman's hands,
And, dreamer though he was, had not the grace
To dream that they could fade away so soon,
And gathered for the Rhine his boastful bands.

V.

Gaily they gathered, shouting for the Rhine,
But the grim foe was resolute and staunch,
And, rising like the Day-god from the East,
Dissolved the avalanche.
Where are they now?—Where is their promised feast?
Some on their violated fields unburied blanch,
And some have reached Berlin—a scared and captive line.

VI.

"No more of this," I think I hear you say;
"It suits not with the place or time;
"The work is grave, and Christmas should be gay;
"The deeds were great, and idle is the rhyme."
Truly small joy is thinking,
And pleasanter it were to laugh and play;
With song and drinking
To keep the memory of the Blessed Day,
Than brood upon the past with sad hearts shrinking.

VII.

If only the pale Present in her womb
Carried the germ of a regenerate world;
When hatred and the greed of gain should cease;
If we could see War's banners furled,
His legions broke, his captives in release,
All evil demons hurled
Far out of sight into Gehenna's gloom,
And find the Prince of Peace
Risen, indeed, to be our only King,
And all the flowers of Spring
Burgeoning sweetly in his empty tomb!

VIII.

So let us dream—
And sing if we must sing in a strange land—
And here by Babel's stream
Hang up our harps, a weak, bewildered band!

Sure only that our Maker has a cause,
And they who learn His laws,
And walk therein, shall feel His guiding hand;
Meanwhile becomes us best to sit and wait
For the unfolding of the Temple gate,
Not pining after pleasure or applause.

IX.

Rulers and States may prosper or may fail,
Cities be sacked and armies overthrown;
Still let us know that Right—
Care of the gods whatever foes assail—
Will conquer in the end, and reign alone.
So on the realm of autumn night
Rolls the red deluge of the Northern light,
But ebbs again; and lo! without a veil
The full-orbed glory of the Harvest Moon.

LUTETIA INFELIX.

She is fallen, the runagate Harlot
That sate by the shores of the Seine,
Whose sins have been redder than scarlet,
Who will help, who will raise her again?
For the cup of her old fornications
No longer is shining or sweet,
And the net that she spread for the nations
Has taken her own dainty feet.

She said,—Surely God has forgotten,
Or His eye-sight with age is grown dim,
And all that is tasteless or rotten
Will be sacrifice ample for Him.

Let the foolish and old find their pleasure
To serve Him and plead for His cause;
But let me spend my strength and my treasure
In rebelling and breaking His laws.

And her sons, from the Prince to the trader,
Were creatures of revel and lust,
And her daughters' enticements had made her
The fear and the scorn of the just.
Then the Lord loosed the people upon her
That the cold silent years had brought forth,
A people that held Him in honour,
The terrible men of the North.

Woe is thee! Cleopatra of cities,
That courted the kings of the earth,—
With dirges in place of thy ditties,
And mourning to swallow thy mirth.
Woe is thee! when a yellow-haired victor
Enfolds thee with pitiless grasp,
And thou thinkest, too late, of the Lictor,
The funeral bier, and the asp.

What is this? thou afflicted and drunken,
Yet not with the odours of wine,
A kiss on thy cold mouth so shrunken,
And a smile in those deep eyes of thine?
Not in vain hast thou fruitlessly striven,
Not in vain felt the strong hand of God,
I thy smile be for evil forgiven,
And thy kiss for the chastening rod.

Though thy sins have been redder than scarlet,
And thy poison-cup shining and sweet,
There is peace for the penitent Harlot,
And a breaking of nets for her feet.
And behold! thou art blest in thy burning,
And the sap in thy trunk shall not fail,
Like an oak, when the spring is returning,
Whose leaves have been stript by the gale.

LE COQ FRANCAIS.

"Aquilâ generosior ales."
Louis XIII.

Thus our fathers heard the story
When they knew him as honest foes—
"*Le Coq Francais* is a bird of glory,
The more he is beaten, the louder he crows,
Bidding the nations awake from sleep,
Monarchs tremble and Peter weep."

Where has he not flapped his wing,
Where has not his challenge been hurled,
He said, "This is a marvellous thing
Crowing over a conquered world;

With pullets I may have been nursed in youth,
But I am an Eagle, and that is truth."

He cropt the Lily; the hungry Bees
  He followed north, and east, and south,
Only checked by the chiding seas,
  And the roar of the leopard's mouth;
And never another beast or bird
Prowled for prey till he gave the word.

How is he fallen in bloody dust,
  Mangled under the winter skies,
Matched alike in valour and lust,
  With beak of steel and peering eyes.
Woe is me, for the noble fowl
Struck to earth by a mousing owl!

And this to be thy endless rest
  Wrapped in a tattered Tricolor?
No Eagle's truly is now thy crest:
  Yet, be not afraid, make one change more:
Let the wondering nations see
What manner of thing may a Phœnix be.

Thy spurs and thy red plumes forget,
—Hushed the note of thy battle horn,—
Thy fruitful country is left thee yet,
The hills of wine, the valleys of corn,
And a voice in thy heart that whispers low,—
"I am free, and a slave my foe."

Make no desperate sudden choice
Of faded Lily or dung-bred Bee;
Leave the swaggering Gallic voice;
Show the world that the Frank is free.
Surely again shall thy song be heard,
And all men bless it, glorious bird!

For Tophet has been ordained of old,
Yea, for the King it is prepared,
When all the evil spirits that hold
Our poor world captive shall vanish scared
And be rolled with the night-clouds far away
In the dew-bright dawn of a deathless day.

TO MOLIÈRE.

(FROM THE FRENCH OF GONDINET.)

WHAT times are fitter for renown than these?
Never, O master, brighter shone thy fame;
Backed by the gloom of lurid victories
How brightly shows the bard's immortal name!

Agnes, Alcestis, Scapin; though we bring
Our homage here, we smile at them no more;
Our Paris is a captive, battered thing,
That worships genius by the cannon's roar.

But raised by thee the soul grows calm again,
And, in the soft land where thy dreams invite,
—Such is the magic of thy well-loved strain—
The northern hordes have vanished from our sight.

Lightly we sought the battle in our pride;
They through the silent forests, patiently,
Inglorious victors, with their skill for guide
Crushed us beneath united Germany.

And now, because in spite of all their rules,
We will not die as fast as they desire,
They hurl upon our hospitals and schools
A hurricane of never-ceasing fire.

Paris, you said, was made for all mankind,—
Fools! Now you know that she is all our own,
You know it by the hatred, hard and blind,
That parts us better than a wall of stone.

Wherever their insulting feet have pressed,
Disgrace and murder in their path they bring;
And in our fields, by lavish Nature blest,
They fear to leave an inch of ground for Spring.

They burn our homes, they make their camp Versailles—
Versailles, where all things speak of thee, Molière
And in her storied galleries and aisles,
Tarnish our fame to make their own seem fair.

Let them vamp up a throne there for their King,
Bind on his brow a diadem of steel,
And rivet so their chains that every ring
Enters into their souls as low they kneel.

Behold them wandering through the silent town—
These phantom Kings, his mandates to obey,
O! wit and thinker, if in looking down,
Thine eye can mark such petty things as they.

Let an old man vicariously brave
His sepulchre at France's cost provide,
Its splendour will not match the grassy grave
Of the last youth who for his country died.

Blest be our sorrows! Europe in her gloom
May crouch and kneel to Might's ambiguous right;
We find once more the light beyond the tomb,
Scorn of success, and Death's triumphal flight.

Thou countest still the pulses of our hearts,
William the Grim! count them while still they beat;
France from her wings shakes vice and all its arts.
You thought her fallen—behold her on her feet—

Aye, and a glow of glory on her brow,
Proud of her wounds, and still in spirit free
Fairer than ever, proudly raising now,
Over all sounds, the cry of "Liberty!"

Menken's Epitaph.

"She expressed a wish to be buried in accordance with the rites of her religion, with nothing to mark her resting-place but a plain piece of wood bearing the words 'Thou knowest.'"—"Home News," August 14th, 1868.

THOU knowest why my birth was in the swamps
Of Mississippi; where the lamps
From hell and brothel light a crew
Abhorred alike of Gentile and of Jew;
Where souls suck sin, and fever drinks the damps,
And oaths to Thee are many, and prayers few,
Jehovah!

Thou knowest why, wherever the sun shines,
Both by the Western and the Eastern Sea,
To men of every nation and degree,
Not knowing of Thy mercies and Thy signs,
I showed myself for hire, but hid from Thee,
While I made sport among the Philistines,
Jehovah!

Thou knowest, doubtless, why these things were so,
And why my pleasures have been full of pain;
All was from Thee. The world from which I go,
Let me but never see its like again,
And I will thank Thy mercy, and not complain,
Because Thou knowest more than I can know,
Jehovah!

EASTER.

We were a broken band that, many a day,
Had wandered into alien camps,
And, smitten with strange faces by the way,
Had fallen into pits of mire and clay,
And then, foreworn with following,
Had lain there wallowing,
Contented with the vermin and the damps.

But One came by, they said, with bleeding hand,
They saw Him stand
At the pit's mouth, and heard Him say "Arise,
Behold I am risen! Haste ye and give warning,
I go to meet the Bride; the breath of morning
Trembles already in the Eastern skies."

We rose, we broke our bonds, we followed Him,
We heard the bird of dawn, saw Phosphor shin
With waning lustre, growing ever dim,
But none of us could see Him, and the line
Of hills came round us like a pathless rim.

"He had been to the garden, all alone,
While the Bride slept, but her heart woke her soon,
She sought to find Him in His agony;
His Love, His undefiled, is but one,
And therefore in His tribulation she
Had wept Him two days long with fast and *tenebræ*.

"The shades are fled; and shall she not rejoice,
Bring incense, wreathe the colonnades in bloom,
Garnish His empty tomb;
Let the loud cannon answer to the voice
Of women singing sweet and soft;
And, pealing thunders from the organ-loft,
Let trumpet-notes of triumph shake the Dome?

"Yet ah! blame not the Bride for weeping,
Doubting, and murmuring—she knew not what—
When they had taken Him from her in her sleeping;
And she was beaten and bound,
And bruised her feet upon the stony ground,
And He was near her, though she knew it not."

And we, too, sought Him, and our doubt and fear
Were even as hers, and, when we heard His call,
We followed, one and all;
Now in her triumph may we not draw near,
And spread our clothes before Him in the ways
And sing a song He will not scorn to hear
Though she may frown upon our untaught lays?

Poor weaklings that we be!
To whom should we give praise, if not to Thee,
Fairest among ten thousand? If Thou be risen,
Then risen too are we,
And fled with haste
Out of the dreary waste,
Looking no more for ever, to the prison
From which Thy victory has set us free!

In Ipsis Floribus.

[ON SEEING A LADY WEARING FLOWERS GATHERED IN A CEMETERY.]

So fair you move, so light among the crowd,
The common eye had scarcely been allowed—
But for the blossoms on your brow and breast—
To recognize the woman in the cloud.

Your breast, your brow, the shrines of love and wit,
Whereon no ornaments but Nature's sit—
No! for such gold and ivory as yours
The ornaments of Nature are most fit;

Amethyst buds engarlanded of gree...
Make meet regalia for a summer queen;
And, ere the hours be sped that wither both,
Kindle false hopes of keeping what has been;

False! yet what mortal thing can man behold
Fairer than ivory skin and locks of gold?
With tender hues encompassed from the couch
Where man's last slumber waits him, in the mould?

Aye! where these innocent blossoms grew, a tomb
Perhaps to-morrow may be dug—for whom?
The dead lie underneath the lavish roots,
And beauty's star glows brighter in the gloom.

Egyptian laws decreed that, piled on high,
Ancestral bones at feasts should still be by;
So, in its maddest moments, life should win
Heart-beats from looking on mortality.

And, though another way of life be ours,
The ancient Guest still holds his ancient powers;
For Death still makes us smile and sigh by turns,
Who flourish, and who vanish, like the flowers.

The Tents of Shem.

(Gen. ix. 27.)

The Corpses of dead cities, the dry bones
Of a lost world in indistinct decay—
Such are these scattered stones,
This trace of a departed day.
Here is the home of bat and bird,
The jackals hold their witches' Sabbath here,
And in the palaces of kings are heard
The lewd Bengalee laugh, the Cockney's silly sneer.

Looking on lordly arch and tall minar,
The glowing sandstone shaft upon the green,
We feel how void of grace our own lives are,
And what the race who left them must have been.

No forms of bird or beast, no shape of man
Intrude distraction:
But with a comely geometric plan
The Arabesque allays the thought of action.
The leaning lotus with inverted urn
Over the carven lintel seems to turn;
And over all, like fairy links and fetters,
The solemn scripture-letters.

Was, then, the mind of man so blest in youth,
So steeped in form, so ignorant of care?
And we, afflicted with a lust of truth,
Mocked with a monster when we say,
"Trappings and masks away,
Give us her beauty bare!"
What have we gained? From many a sculptured tomb
These dead philosophers may cast
Disdain upon us wandering in gloom,
And mock us with the irrevocable past;
"Yours," they may say, "the star-struck sage's doom,
Who would not see the appointed road,
But as with upward glance he strode

Hither and thither, fell
Into an open well.
Yours is to bear forlorn
The shock, the ruin, and the scorn,
And—worst of lies, and last device of hell—
To find the grain of truth that makes a falsehood tell."

What answer can we make to this—
We—who have pawned our souls
To Mammon or Belphegor; we whose bliss,
At most, is blowing at the coals
Filched by a fraud from Heaven's high altar,
Till our breath fail us, and our pulses falter?
I know the answer, I have learnt the rant,
Pledge of deceitful peace;
Shall I repeat the common cant
That bids our sweet dreams cease?
"The joys of earth in love of Heaven expire,
Even as the sunbeams quench all meaner fire;
The hearts of men reflect Divinity,
As the moon's face shifts in the shifting sea

And so through many an image trite and tame,
The languid waters creep
To quench enjoyment's salutary flame;
And art's cascades are shown as waterfalls,
And shallow unto shallow calls,
And says that deep is calling unto deep.

Knaves, when you dupe them, bluster; fools complain;
The wise man smiles, but trusts you not again;
I do not blame the masters of the schools
That teach our modern rules;
But here, amid the records of a time
When men were satisfied with life,
I spin for idle ears an idle rhyme,
Proclaim to discord war to the very knife,
Protest against unrest, and counsel strife with strife.

Father alike of these men and of us!
Judge Thou between us; if we dare,
Impious race of Japhet, to the air
To raise our aspirations, call us back,
Show us our welfare is not thus,

With a kind hand restore us to the earth
  Lead us in a more wholesome track,
Restore to us the blessings of our birth.

Thou art and wert, and wilt be. In Thy sight
  A thousand years are but as yesterday,
Spent like the last watch of a summer night,
  When weary revellers sleep their wi[illegible]
We pine and fret in fever-haunted dr[illegible]
  We call our proper darkness an ecl[illegible]
We pant and stumble, chasing meteor-[illegible]
  The Dead-Sea apples crumble on our [illegible];
Oh! give us rose-wreaths, not the mart[illegible],
  Restore our child-like joys as at the [illegible];
Give us contented ignorance and calm,
  And natural water-springs to quench o[illegible].

ANTI-LOCKSLEY,

OR,

THE PERVERT'S APOLOGY.

YES! the step is taken, and I for my part have done
With wine, and the flesh of swine, and the faith of the carpenter's son,
I have done with the creed of the cross, and left off going to pray,
Where a eunuch-minded prater preaches for praise and pay.

I am sick of civilisation, with all its cant and sham,
Its wars that are waged in the cause of trade, with the flag of the Lamb;
Its men who believe in nothing, and live without fear and hope,
Its women who patter thieves' Latin, and dance, and drink, and elope—
Who leave their husbands to toil alone in the dust and heat,
Who wear a corpse's hair, and are false to the salt they eat:
Yes! I am sick of it all, and your world will call me back,
When it teaches the weary camel to pick up a fallen pack.
There is no God but Allah!—he needs no help from man,
Whom he will save, he saves without theological plan:
Was Bethlehem's manger meant to end in Oxford schools?
And your prating preacher haranguing a crowd of frivolous fools?
Defining a God who dwells in a temple not made with hands,
Intoning through his nose what nobody understands.

God is a Spirit, we are all agreed on that; I suppose,
His glory cannot depend on the use of the human nose.

* * * * *

What has your civilisation done for the people here?
Has it made them prosper?—or poorer, think you, year by year?
Skulking in rotten cabins, like foul and famished ghosts,
While you live at Simla concocting statistics and well-paid posts;
Standing like trees between the soil and the beams of God,
Furnishing each clod-hopper with one supporting clod?
This is not your ideal? Well, and what is it then?
Flatulent Bengal students aping the manners of men!
People that hate you like poison, praising you up to the skies,
Greeks of the Lower Empire building a throne on lies?
No, no! I've done with it all—its cruelty, cant, and pride,
And I turn to the life of the desert, the tent, and the untaught bride.

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Yes! and Amina is mine—mine here, not away on the hills.
Rich in a wealth of love, not a sheaf of milliners' bills,
With a shape unspoiled by stays, and a foot uncramped by a shoe,
To be mother of healthy babes, who will live as God meant them to do!
The picture is pretty, no doubt, that you draw of my childhood's home,
The fruitful uplands of Lea, and his meadows where cattle roam;
The low saltsands of the Channel, the rocks where the breakers beat,
And the Sussex Downs overhead where the sky and the landscape meet;
The nightingale's song in June, the winter whistling wild,
And the chime of the churchward bells; but one is not always a child.
I have changed all that long since for what experience brings,
And, if you would talk to a man, you must talk about man-like things.

So the step is taken, you see, and you have said your say,
And the world may frown and wonder, and take what it
can take away;
You have said your say, and I have replied with mine.
Leave me now to my bread and salt, and return to your
pork and wine.
And your world where everything but worth alone is dear,
And a man and his wife will starve on a thousand pounds
a-year.

The Other Side.

WHERE boon Bhagirutti comes broadening down,
From her cradle of snows,
By many a hamlet and village and town,
Where the holy stream flows,
At the time of the harvest a loud lamentation arose,—

The cry of the reapers whose labour was sped,
On the drought-smitten plain,
The cry of the children that wanted for bread,
Of a people in pain.
Who thought that they suffered, and toiled and were patient in vain.

And who said, "Of a truth our desert and reward
Are at terrible odds;
And far in the hills sleeps our temporal lord
With our negligent gods:
While we starve here, begrimed in the dust of our
waterless clods.

"What avails it to pray, with a suppliant hand,
To this comfortless sky,
Or to waste plough and seed on this traitorous sand?
Let us lie down and die;
There is never a god or a man to give ear to our cry!"

So they; but the sound of their sorrow went forth
On the wings of the breeze,
Being borne by the lightning to hills of the north,
And, under the seas,
To the Queen of the Isles sitting throned in her splendour
and ease.

Then the princes and people arose with their treasure,
To succour such need;
And they paused in their toil and they turned from their pleasure,
And with food and with seed,
Made glad the weak hearts of an alien colour and creed.

For the elements served them; the fire and the air
On the sea and the shore,
Bearing money and corn, coming here, going there,
As the ants to their store
Hurry home in an orderly line when the day is no more:

Till the terrible odds of the strife passed away
And there came, once again,
In the season appointed, the genial ray
And the affluent rain,
And boon Bhagirutti once more in her valley of grain.

Shall not these things, I pray you, be mentioned while men
Keep our memory alive,
And the writer of chronicles uses the pen
That upbraids us with Clive,
And with taking the honey and leaving the bees but the hive?

And He, over all, whose abode is of old,
In the darkness of light,
Who prepares in the rocks of the desert, the gold,
And the day in the night,
And in sin and shortcoming of men the long triumph of Right?

And in Rulers a heart of compassion to bless,
And a longing to save;
A knee to be bent, and a tongue to confess
That the throne which He gave
Was only an inn where to shelter the poor on the way to the grave.

A ROMAN SOIRÉE.

How well I remember the season—
Just after a total eclipse—
When I partly recovered my reason,
By a wonderful Apocalypse.

The villas, the statues and pictures
The Churches, the ruins of Rome,
The Murray-and-water strictures
Of fools who were wiser at home,

All made a harmonious pot-pourri
Of which she was still the theme,
Till she brought about, Philistine Houri,
The finale, unlooked for, supreme.

She sate in her tulle by the window,
With a cyclamen wreath on her brow,
And I worshipped her, much as a Hindoo
May worship a pure white cow.

The whirl of the dance, the music,
Acted one way on me that night,
As the smell of the musk makes you sick
Which you brother inhales with delight.

But she said, with a grace that was decent,
As we looked at a mist-bedecked moon,
That "the loss of her first was too recent,
To let her re-marry so soon."

Though the moon never lighted at Latmos,
A more love-smitten shepherd than then,
Yet I rushed to my cavern on Patmos,
The *Angleterre*, Numero ten.

And I started next day for the Mountain,
That burns by a blue-satin main,
And halted in passing the fountain,
Whose taste makes you come back again.

But instead of drinking of Trevi,
And storing as relics her notes,
I made them a miniature navy
To cover its basin with boats.

And I made of the hyssop a balm-tree,
And I said, as the days went by—
That the Pine that dreamed of the Palm-tree
Was not such a fool as I.

THE TAJ.

WHITE, like a spectre seen when night is old,
Yet stained with hues of many a tear and smart,
Cornelian, blood-stone, matched in callous art:
Aflame like passion, like dominion cold,
Bed of imperial consorts whom none part
For ever (domed with glory, heart to heart)
Still whispering to the ages, "Love is bold,
And seeks the height, though rooted in the mould";
Touched, when the dawn floats in an opal mist,
By fainter blush than opening roses own;
Calm in the evening's lucent amethyst;
Pearl-crowned, when midnight airs aside have blown
The clouds that rising moonlight vainly kissed;
—An aspiration fixed, a sigh made stone.

October 1877.

Statesman and Poet! If thy life be crost
By envious foes and foolish friends, fare on,
Sure that thy name will shine when these are gone
And sunk in Malebolge.
Though we have lost
The tongues of fire that fell at Pentecost
And on the wondering Galileans shone,
Retrieving the defeat of Babylon,
Yet genius warmed by love can melt the frost
That binds our souls from speaking clear to others,
And with auspicious lightning that will dare
To leap from heart to heart, a holy flame,
Till Peer and Peasant know that they are brothers.
Poet and Statesman! But the sons of Care
Will mark thy memory with a nobler name.

To a Disparaged Statesman.

Suffer in silence. It is better far
To hide in your own flesh the unwelcome steel
Than let the archers know what pain you feel,
Or cry, with joy, "How keen our arrows are!"
And never think that Caliban will kneel
Before the splendour of a distant star;
You will but drag him to that radiant bar
Where, but for you, he vainly would appeal,
Unheard, unheeded. Therefore light the lamps,
Call in those smiling traitors your dear friends,
And to your throbbing forehead make amends
With wreaths of roses for the gathering damps.
Their life and yours are passed in different camps,
And yours begins where theirs for ever ends.

THE MOSLEM AND THE MUSCOVITE.

Too long has Europe seen her fairest lands,
And those who till them, wasted by the blight
Of Tartar conquest, and the lurid light
From arson kindled by the felon hands
Of bravo-troops; yet not the less demands
Clean hands in the avengers, not the spite
Of rival Tartars in an equal plight,
Unblest Crusaders.
But the foul commands
Belong not to the Prophet's sacred page,
Nor to the spirit of those who made so fain
The Mesopotamian desert, or of those
Who built for Shahjahan or mild Firoz,
Or met, with tutorship urbane and sage,
In arms and arts the chivalry of Spain.

HOPE.

We wander in the forest or the field,
With little pleasure; though the sky be fair,
And, floating round be song and scented air,
And long-armed trees pursue us with a shield
Of tender tints, to temper the sun's glare.
We seek our kind; with half the heart revealed.
We tell our love, but something is concealed;
So music, so the chase, the theatre's flare,
The dance, the battle, find us, leave us, pining,
We loathe the thing that is, love what is not,
We come to hate, at last, our greatest good
(Yet cannot sell our birthright if we would),
And could not bear the happiest human lot,
But for death's rainbow on the horizon shining.

Sir Walter Raleigh.

(Nullum numen abest si sit prudentia.)

A TRUCKLING Court and a degraded King,
A people hostile, and a soul too sage,
Too wide and universal for the age
In which thou wert a burning light, did bring
Calamity upon thee. Time will sing,
Great heart! thy praises: dead, thou dost engage
All time in thy defence; dead, thou shalt fling
On those that wronged thee hatred for their rage,
Contempt and loathing for their felon fear
So blindly cruel. But thou shouldst have sought
Virginian shores, a blameless Buccaneer,
Thy flag proclaiming, with eternal sheen,
The unfathomable sea that sways between
The slaves of Custom and the lords of Thought.

The End of the Season.

As, through the oakwood gloom
The last sad straggler slowly wends
Towards the land of heat and end of leisure,
The thunder rattles and the rain descends;
And, where the tortured branches weep,
The misty phantoms creep;
And thus, in blown confusion ends
His dream-like hour of pleasure:
Above him lies the Lake in leafy beauty,
Below, the wide, white soil of aimless labour,
No tabernacles now for him on Tabor,
But dull bright days, of unrequited duty,
And somewhere in the dark, his dim undoubted doom.

She is far hence, whose friendship was so sweet,
Whose sympathetic smile
Without a pulse of passion warmed the heart,
Whose words made care go sleep a little while;
Whose limber, curven feet
Made truer music in the lit saloon
Than flute and hautboy matched in feeble art
To pipe their scrannel tune;
We have touched hands and parted; she is gone
To tread the wine-press all alone.

Where are they all, the frolic throng
That never seemed to think,
But laughed the summer through, with dance and song?
I cannot say what fates to them belong,
But this one spell
Is theirs, I know too well,
No more to meet beside the Lake's low brink.

On their deserted haunts
The mountain-shadow slants
A darkness that forestals the autumn night;
But Nandi-Devi and her nymphs in white

Look down immovable in solemn range;
They, on whose brow time works no change,
Save when the sunset's glow
Kisses them to a sudden flame
As of a virgin shame
Blushing that such affront should be;
Or when the new-fallen snow
Casting its veil upon them, shall bestow
On their pure heads fresh mystery of light,
And fresh virginity.

They stand for ever there; but we go on,
Whither?
There comes no whisper of reply,
Only the storm retreats, the cold blue sky
Bends round us with a promise of repose;
But if we shall rest there when all is done
Is more, perhaps, than any teacher knows.

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